

Memorandum

TO: Mr. Pete Gutwald, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning

FROM: Jennifer M. Smith, Geosyntec Consultants, Inc.

DATE: September 17, 2007

SUBJECT: Zoning Code Update Meeting 5 – Meeting Summary
September 10, 2007, Second Floor Conference Room
Harford County Office Building

Attendees

Workgroup Members Present:

Ms. Susie Comer
Col. Charles Day
Ms. Carol Deibel
Mr. Bill Vanden Eynden
Mr. Samuel Fielder, Jr.
Mr. William E. Goforth
Mr. Rowan G. Glidden
Mr. Frank Hertsch
Mr. Jeffrey K. Hettleman
Mr. Douglas Howard
Mr. Gil Jones
Mr. Gregory J. Kappler
Ms. Gloria Moon
Mr. Torrence Pierce
Mr. Frank Richardson
Mr. Lawrason Sayre
Mr. Jim Turner
Mr. Craig Ward
Ms. Marisa Willis
Mr. Jay Young

Workgroup Members Absent:

Ms. Susan B. Heselton
Mr. Tim Hopkins
Mr. Chris Swain

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County Representatives Present:

Mr. Pete Gutwald, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning

Mr. Tony McClune, Deputy Director, Department of Planning and Zoning

Ms. Janet Gleisner, Chief, Division of Land Use and Transportation

Ms. Theresa Raymond, Administrative Assistant, Director's Office

Facilitators:

Ms. Jennifer M Smith, Geosyntec

Ms. Christy Ciarametaro, Geosyntec

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Meeting Summary

The fifth meeting of the Harford County Zoning Code Update Workgroup was held at 2:00 pm in the second floor conference room at the offices of the Department of Planning and Zoning. A meeting agenda was distributed to each workgroup member. A sign-in sheet was distributed to the group. The Meeting Summary from Meeting 4 was distributed for review and was approved.

Presentation by DPZ – Signs

To continue the discussion on Signs from Meeting 4, Mr. Pete Gutwald, Harford County's Director of Planning and Zoning, distributed two proposed options for Electronic Message Boards under §267-33(B)(2) of the proposed Zoning Code. The first proposed option was more restrictive and did not allow message scrolling. Additionally, the first option limited signs to single sided, with electronic copy area not to exceed 50% of sign area, and characters with amber lighting on a black background only. The second option did not limit sign message area coverage or character and background color, allowed for double sided signs and allowed scrolling, with limitations.

Workgroup Discussion:

A workgroup discussion followed Mr. Gutwald's presentation.

1. Topic: How should electronic message boards be regulated?

Discussion:

- Clarifications made by DPZ: Electronic message boards are a type of freestanding sign and are not permitted as a type of billboard. DPZ does not regulate the interior of buildings so the proposed requirements would not apply to interior signs. If a sign is partially electronic, it will be considered an electronic message board. It was clarified that in option one, the 50% requirement of the copy area referred to the electronic portion of the sign. The purpose of restricting

electronic copy to 50% of the allowable sign area in Option One is to reduce the potential for distraction to motorists that may be caused by the sign.

- Workgroup members discussed some of the design requirements under Option one of Electronic Message Boards. It was mentioned that identifying a specific color requirement may be too restrictive to clients who have company design requirements or logos.
- Workgroup members also discussed issues related to business' that may have already purchased a specific electronic message board prior to realizing that a permit is required. It was mentioned that proactively mailing the new sign regulations out to businesses may prevent noncompliance with permits.
- It was suggested that mechanically changing signs which do not produce light should also be regulated. Mechanical signs may include electronic dye signs with changing colors or flash card signs with animation.
- Scrolling text should not be too slow or drivers may slow down in order to read the entire sign text.
- It was suggested that the definition of electronic message boards apply to signs which change their display more than once a day.
- In order to accommodate future technologies, the requirements for signs should not be too stringent.

Result:

- The workgroup agreed (with dissenting views) to use Option 2 for regulating Electronic Message boards. Scrolling signs, with limitations, will be allowed and there will be no specific color restriction.
- The workgroup agreed to use the term "Variable Message Boards" instead of "Electronic Message Board" under §267-33(B)(2). Also, the definition of Variable Message Boards will be "signs with a changing display – electronic or mechanical".

2. Topic: Light Intensity on Signs

Discussion:

- In the Signs section of the proposed zoning code, lighted and illuminated signs are both addressed in §267-33(F). Safety issues regarding light intensity are addressed in §267-33(H). The workgroup expressed an interest in having an overall maximum wattage restriction on signs. Specifically, there is a concern about light reflected off of signs from a spotlight and from the general brightness in the area caused from both internal and external lighting of signs.

Result:

- The workgroup agreed to revise the sign code to refer to industry standards to restrict the lumens measured on neighboring properties caused by internal or external light sources. Town of Bel Air (Carol Deibel) will supply the industry standards for lumens.

3. Topic: Where should "Variable Message Boards" be allowed?

Discussion:

- With the restrictions now placed on variable message boards (from the approved Option 2 language), variable message boards should not provide a safety concern for any district/use. Since variable message boards are a type of freestanding sign, they are already restricted in residential districts.

Result:

- The workgroup agreed (with dissenting views) to eliminate the restriction stated in Option 2 that variable message boards only be allowed in B1, B2, B3, and C1 zoning districts.

4. Topic: Real Estate Signs

Discussion:

- There was concern by workgroup members that real estate signs would be required to be removed prior to the actual transfer, or “closing”, of the property.

Result:

- The workgroup agreed to change the restrictions in §267-33(D)(7) to state that real estate signs will be permitted until “7 calendar days after the execution of a lease or transfer of the property”.

5. Topic: Public Transit Stop Shelters

Discussion:

- DPZ gave a brief history on this standard in the current Sign Code. It was mentioned that this requirement permitted signs(as billboards) for bus shelters through an agreement with vendors who would supply and maintain these shelters. It was also mentioned that the agreement has not been utilized.

Result:

- The workgroup agreed to remove §267-33(D)(9).

6. Topic: Area of Irregularly Shaped Signs

Discussion:

- There was concern by workgroup members that the requirement to calculate the area of irregular shaped signs by using the area of multiple rectangles was unnecessary.

Result:

- The workgroup agreed (with dissenting views) to eliminate §267-33(E)(3).

7. Topic: Removal of Signs in Violation of Zoning Code Requirements

Discussion:

- The requirement to remove signs within 10 calendar days of the date of notice seemed too stringent to some workgroup members. If people are out of town, they may not be able to respond to the notice in that time frame. However, for safety reasons, the County should be able to require a quick removal of a violating sign. Clarification was made that the procedural process for violators of the Zoning Code includes an initial written notification prior to the formal notification of the violation.

Result:

- The workgroup agreed (with a dissenting view) to keep the 10 calendar day requirement and leave §267-33(I)(3) as currently stated.

8. Topic: Sign Height

Discussion:

- The requirement in §267-33(K)(1)(e) and §267-33(K)(8)(d) that signs not exceed 6 feet in height above the **road** grade is not practical in areas where the road crest is lower than the elevation of the adjacent land at the required sign location. In many instances the site grade changes significantly as it departs from the public road right of way.

Result:

- The workgroup agreed to change the text in §267-33(K)(1)(e) and §267-33(K)(8)(d) of the proposed Zoning Code to state “no more than 6 feet above ground level or 6 feet above road grade, whichever is greater.”

9. Topic: Structural Requirements

Discussion:

- The requirement in §267-33(G) that structures comply with the International Building Code is not necessary if structures must already comply with standards adopted by Harford County.

Result:

- The workgroup agreed (with a dissenting view) to eliminate §267-33(G).

10. Topic: Consistency with Sign Design Requirements in Different Districts

Discussion:

- While some districts (such as RO, VB, MO) require that signs “compliment the architectural element of the building and reflect the architectural period of the building,” other districts (such as CRD) require that signage be “compatible in quality, style, color, and materials to the building(s)”. Workgroup members expressed concern that differing requirements would lead to inconsistencies in quality.

Result:

- The workgroup agreed (with dissenting views) to use the sign quality language from the CRD section of the Zoning Code and apply it to all districts by listing it under General Provisions, §267-33(C).

11. Topic: Location of Institutional Signs

Discussion:

- There was a clarification that institutional signs were pushed back from 10 feet to 20 feet from roadways because these signs are for identification purpose, not for advertising.

Result:

- No action taken.

12. Topic: Project Development Signs vs. Construction Signs

Discussion:

- There was a clarification that project development signs identify the overall development, while construction signs located at the same site identify the contractors/banks involved in the project. If a sign contains both types of information, the sign will be classified as the type which takes up the majority of area on the sign.

Result:

- No action taken.

13. Topic: Definition for a Marquee

Discussion:

- There was a clarification that marquees are structures and not signs. A sign can be attached to a marquee. Note: DPZ will include a definition of Sign, Marquee for consistency purposes.

Result:

- No action taken.

14. Topic: Approval of Sign Plan

Discussion:

- There was a clarification about when Sign Plans are submitted and approved. Sign Plans can be submitted, as a separate document, at the same time as the site plan. Additionally, Sign Plans can be submitted and/or modified after the Site Plan has been submitted. Modifications required to a Sign Plan after the Site Plan has been approved will not require approval of a revision to the Site Plan.

Result:

- No action taken.

At Meeting 6, the workgroup will discuss Forest and Tree Conservation (§267-34 thru §267-48).

Administrative Issues:

The meeting was adjourned at 3:50 pm.

The Harford County Zoning Code website can be accessed at:
<http://www.harfordcountymd.gov/ZCUpdate/index.cfm>.

Meeting Handouts

1. Meeting Agenda
2. Draft Meeting 4 Summary – August 27, 2007
3. Proposed Options for Describing Electronic Message Boards

Next Scheduled Meetings

Date: September 24, 2007
Time: 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm
Topic: Meeting 6 – Forest and Tree Conservation
Location: Harford County Administrative Office Building
220 South Main Street
2nd Floor Conference Room
Bel Air, MD 21014

Date: October 8, 2007
Time: 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm
Topic: Meeting 7 – Agriculture (Presentation on Transfer of Development Rights)
Location: Harford County Administrative Office Building
220 South Main Street
2nd Floor Conference Room
Bel Air, MD 21014